



# The International Fancy Guppy Association



Dedicated to Promoting The Fancy Guppy Hobby

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## Foods and Feeding

By Tom Allen

As a guppy breeder, whether you consider yourself a beginner or a master breeder, you should try to adopt two specific goals into your breeding program. First, breed for consistency. Uniformity in breeding will come with understanding simple genetics, knowing your strain's dominant and recessive traits, keeping records of past breeding successes and failures and being shrewd enough to know which breeding technique (inbreeding, linebreeding, outcrossing) will provide you with the very best offspring from a mating. Secondly, work out a feeding program that will help to improve the size of your fish. We all know that, all other things (color, etc.) being equal, in competition, the IFGA point system rewards larger fish (more points for body size, caudal size and dorsal size) over their smaller cousins. Tell me, who could resist spending more time in the fishroom when tank after tank in front of you contains 15 super BIG males/females each a clone of every other...this is what consistency and proper feeding can give us...this is what each of us should strive for in our breeding program.

Lets start by discussing foods and feeding. There are three ways to improve your gups size: (1) feeding, (2) genetics and (3) mechanics. Taking them in reverse order, "mechanics" refers to the system of tank maintenance, water changes, etc. that you use. We tend to discuss topics like these more in a negative way...that is, if you neglect taking care of your fish by not making appropriate and frequent water changes or by over-crowding, their size will surely suffer. One of the most common "old wives tales" heard from time to time in relation to guppy size is that putting small fish into a very large tank will advance their growth because they need room to grow. Truly the opposite is the rule...they will remain small because they cannot readily find the food and there is no tendency on their part to "frenzy feed."

Genetics also plays an important role in the size potential that a fish carries. If your strain is genetically small (generally due to an overzealous inbreeding program), no amount of food will ever make them larger. Your best bet would be to locate an unrelated but compatible strain for an outcross. Generally, the F-1 hybrids produced by such an outcross are larger than the parent strains. Many experienced breeders will introduce the F-1 hybrids produced by an outcross back into their parent strains hoping to pick up the added size and vitality the hybrids are noted for.

It has been proven through experimentation that a guppy can digest its food completely in about 45 minutes. If you do the arithmetic, this means that in a 24 hour day, we could feed our fish 32 times. Obviously, nobody is able and/or willing to stay awake to see that their fish are fed 32 times each day. Many of us are converts from the Aquarium Society ranks where we may have a few tanks and fish are typically fed once per day...whether they need it or not. When we realize that our future lies in the guppy hobby and make the transition to specialize, we often carry the A/S habits along. When we finally realize how small our gups really are, we tend to move to the other extreme...we feed far too many times per day which results in dirty and polluted tanks and little overall effect on the size of the fish. What each of us needs to do is to adopt a reasonable feeding regimen... not too few meals so that the fish remain small and not too many meals so the tanks get dirty. When I started in the hobby and my children were small (mom was home to take care of them), my wife was able to feed every 1 1/2 hours allowing for 10-12 meals per day. I found that I had to spend additional time siphoning and changing water to keep the tanks somewhat clean and the fish somewhat healthy. Gradually, we've accepted the fact that we cannot reasonably feed 12 meals each day and have reduced our feeding schedule to 3-5 quality meals. I'm sure the fish are a bit smaller than those I bred in the 70's but as long as they are of a representative size for their strain, I have no complaints.

Let me digress for a moment and touch on the "growing" aspects of guppy breeding. If we were to plot the guppy's growth cycle on a graph, it might look like this:

You can see from the graph that the major growth for the guppy occurs within the first 4-5 months of age and then tails (no pun intended) off as the fish reaches maturity. Putting this into perspective, we would want to feed our younger fish the maximum number of times and our mature fish only once or twice a day. Feeding fewer meals to adult fish keeps the water cleaner, eliminates the need for frequent and heavy water changes and reduces the possibility of tail burn to those fish ready for show.

I like to think of foods in the following categories based on the payback you get from feeding them: (1) live food (baby brine, daphnia, worms, etc.), (2) prepared food (frozen beef heart, liver paste, etc.), (3) freeze-dried foods (brine shrimp, daphnia, tubifex, etc.) and (4) flakes and blends (Earthworm flake, Shubel Master Blend, etc.). Of course, no food by itself will provide all the nutrients needed for proper growth. Therefore, you need to incorporate feeding a variety of foods to your guppies. However, there is no question in my mind that the very best, #1 food for young gups is newly hatched baby brine shrimp. Conservatively, my fish increased 25% in size when I began feeding baby brine. Following, in second place, is frozen beef heart (a recipe follows this article) which can be fed every day and should be fed at least every other day. There are no better foods to build body size than the two listed above. If you truly believe that it is a good practice to feed baby brine daily, then, believe me, it is a better practice to feed baby brine twice a day. Since the brine eggs now on the market hatch in 24 hours, you can set up dual hatchers and harvest one hatch in the morning and the other at night. Another way to do this is to hatch an extra amount from your normal feeding and place the leftover shrimp in brine solution with an airstone to feed later in the day.



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First, this feeding schedule has only one meal of baby brine which, in my estimation, is the minimum that anyone in our hobby should consider. By way of explanation for the 1st and 3rd means, the baby brine and beef-heart would be fed only to our young fish (up to 6 months old) while the adult fish would get only a low-protein flake/blend.

Finally, it is important that everyone who exhibits his/her fish, visit one of the sanctioned IFGA shows to see how your fish "measure up!"

(Authors Note: Many of these ideas were presented as part of the Foods and Feeding program at the recent St. Louis Annual Show)

## Beef heart "Supreme"

### Ingredients

- 6-7 pounds of Beefheart
- 2 jars strained carrots
- 2 jars strained green beans
- 2 hard-boiled egg yolks

### Instructions

1. Remove all fat and sinew from beefheart
2. Cut clean beefheart into 1/2 inch cubes
3. Blend 1 cup of cubed heart with 1-1 1/2 cups of water until syrup consistency
4. Strain mixture through a collander disposing of all remaining fat and sinew
5. Mix in other ingredients after thinning with water (you can add any other supplements at this time)
6. Freeze in freezer bags removing all captured air (you can lay them flat on large cookie tins)
7. Before feeding, allow to melt slightly to facilitate breakup (another choice would be to use a ginger grater to grate the frozen heart directly into the tanks)

Other than uneaten residue, there should not be any problem with feeding frozen beefheart once a day. Coupled with newly-hatched baby brine shrimp, it is an excellent way to put SIZE on your fish.

Tom Allen 2/98

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